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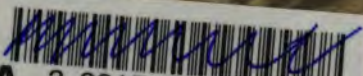
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ARTES SCIENTIA VERITAS

# THE GUTTER OF TIME

A DUOLOGUE IN ONE ACT

BY  
ALFRED BUTTS.

ACTED BY

"The Walls of Jericho" "A Morning's Journey"  
Arranged "A Millionaire in Hand"  
etc., etc.

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# THE GUTTER OF TIME

*A DUOLOGUE IN ONE ACT*

BY

ALFRED SUTRO.

AUTHOR OF

*"The Walls of Jericho," "A Marriage has been  
Arranged," "Mollentrave on Women,"  
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# THE GUTTER OF TIME.

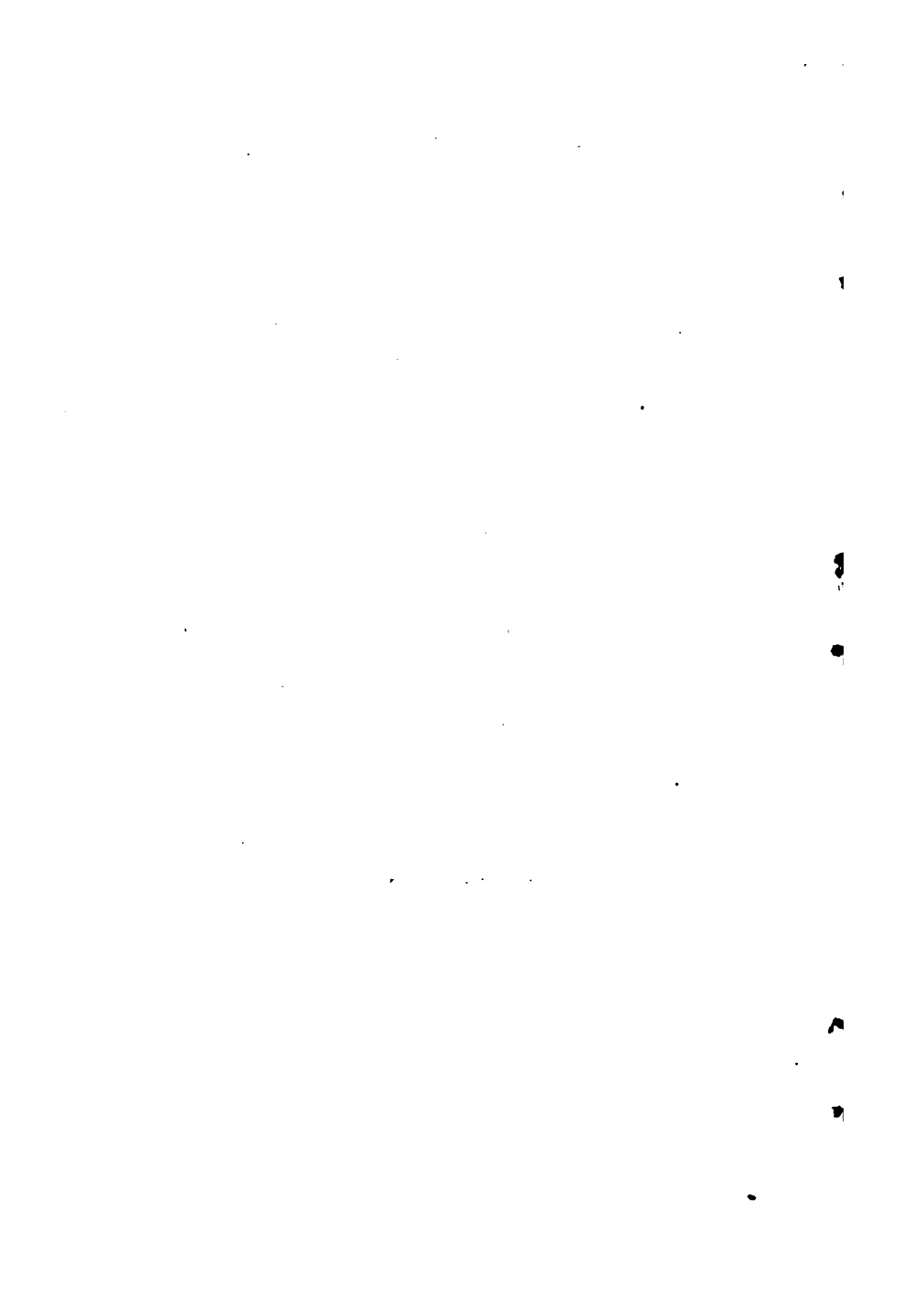
## THE GUTTER OF TIME.

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### CHARACTERS

Mrs. Transford ...	...	...
Sir Harry Jardine	...	...





## THE GUTTER OF TIME.

**SCENE.**—*The drawing-room of MRS. TRANSFORD'S flat in San Francisco. The garish and tasteless appointments are of the kind usually to be found in apartments that are let furnished. Endeavours have, however, been made, and not wholly without success, to tone down the prevailing vulgarity by means of a few good prints and photographs on the walls, a few pleasant draperies; on the small table, by the side of a china tea-service, stands a bowl filled with exquisite roses.*

MRS. TRANSFORD is seated in a low rocking-chair, close to the little table, reading a paper-covered novel. She wears an exceedingly pretty tea-gown, cut rather low at the neck; and as she sways up and down bewildering frills and flounces rush tumultuously over her shoes. She is a very handsome woman—no longer young, but preserving admirably the semblance of youth. Her face, seen in repose, looks hard and stern; there are lines about the mouth and eyes that tell of much sorrow and bitterness; but her expression, when she is speaking and smiling, becomes exceedingly attractive.

The door opens, and SIR HARRY JARDINE enters. He is a very young man, almost a boy: tall, square shouldered, vigorous, with a frank and pleasant face. MRS. TRANSFORD looks up, smiles, and holds out her hand, which he takes eagerly and presses in his.

MRS. TRANSFORD. How nice of you to come! I was so bored.

SIR HARRY. I hope you won't mind my inflicting myself upon you again——

MRS. T. Again? Oh, yes, you came yesterday, didn't you? And the day before? Well, I grant absolution. I've been reading a novel, and could not, for the life of me, feel the slightest interest in hero, heroine, or author. Sit down. You shall have some tea. Would you mind touching the bell? Thank you. What have you been doing to-day?

SIR H. (*sitting*) Oh—lounging about——

MRS. T. That must have been very difficult. America's a big place, but you have to go to the prairies if you want to lounge. Everyone's in a desperate hurry here—except in fiction. I've skimmed through two hundred pages of this book, but nothing has happened yet. And just think what happens in two hundred pages of our own life!

SIR H. If another person could read those pages, he wouldn't find them exciting perhaps.

Mrs. T. That's true enough: and the first chapters are always dull. Tragic, too, in a way. We carry our fairy godmother in our pocket, and don't know it, and nobody tells us.

SIR H. If they did, we shouldn't believe it.

Mrs. T. Oh, no, that's in the scheme of things. We were not meant to be happy, of course, so it was playfully contrived that we should be very foolish when we were young, and afterward acquire just sufficient wisdom to know what fools we have been. Would you mind touching that bell again? Our nigger's very dignified: he only comes at the second call.

SIR H. (*rings*) Don't you think we were meant to be happy?

Mrs. T. Perhaps—as the twenty-storey houses here were meant to be beautiful—but they're not, are they? The architect no doubt has the best intentions—but there are so many interests to consider! Ah—here he comes.

*A black servant enters, with a kettle; he pours the water into the little teapot on the table.*

Water boiling, Tom?

TOM. Yes, missis, sure. (*he goes.*)

Mrs. T. (*peering into the teapot*) It probably isn't, you know. The chief moral distinction between the black and the white is that the former will lie for the mere pleasure of lying. Now I don't think we do. We lie under protest, and, very often, would rather tell the truth.

SIR H. Why do you say such things? I am sure you always tell the truth.

Mrs. T. I do to some people, of course. It's a luxury, and one feels frightfully extravagant. You have been here every day this week: I shall have to economise severely for the next month or two. (*she pours out the tea, hands HARRY a cup, and tastes her own*) No, as I thought—the water was not boiling.

SIR H. (*drinking*) It's very good tea.

Mrs. T. The tea's all right—but if Providence will let the water be tepid—

SIR H. I'd drink ditch-water with relish, if you poured it out for me.

Mrs. T. (*smiling*) You say these things very glibly—I suppose you've said them very often before?

SIR H. You know better than that. I'm not that sort of man. I'm by way of being athletic, you know. I took blue at the 'Varsity.

T. Oh, really? Cricket!

SIR H. Yes: and I'm fond of all sport. Well, that keeps you from being a ladies' man.

Mrs. T. (*dreamily*) I should like to see the match at Lord's again. . . .

SIR H. You haven't been home for a long time?

Mrs. T. It's rather pretty of you to talk of England as my home. No, not for a great many years.

SIR H. And are you never home-sick?

Mrs. T. Home-sick, heart-sick, sick of everything except the sea, which is beautifully clean and deep. I'm a great swimmer, you know.

SIR H. Are you, though? I do a bit that way myself.

Mrs. T. We'll go for a swim together some day, perhaps. It's my one happy time. There's no nonsense about the sea. Leave off swimming, it says to you: just fold your arms and cross your legs, and I'll do the rest. I let myself go down sometimes—down, down, down—and there's a great green wall round you, and you're a million miles from the earth—and then suddenly your heart goes thumping, and you're deliciously afraid: and you throw up your hands and rise—oh, so slowly, so slowly!—and at last, with a bubble and splash, you get to the surface, and draw a long breath; and the sun's shining on you, and people are near—and you feel that the sea's rather angry—it wanted to keep you. Oh, it's great!

SIR H. That's strange. I've never felt like that.

Mrs. T. You don't see the angel on the waves; you don't play hide-and-seek with death.

SIR H. Why should you?

Mrs. T. Why, indeed? But tell me about yourself. Do you shoot?

SIR H. Rather. I don't care for pheasants, you know, and that kind of thing—I like big game, where the beast has a chance. I used to think that was the chief joy in life.

Mrs. T. And now?

SIR H. Now I would rather be with you. . . .

*Having blurted this out, he blushes furiously. An enigmatic smile comes over Mrs. TRANSFORD'S face; she looks quietly at him.*

Please forgive my having said that. I didn't mean to—it slipped out.

Mrs. T. You are forgiven.

SIR H. I—I—you see I've had rather a strange sort of life; I've met very few women. My father died when

was a baby; and my mother never got over it—they hadn't been married two years—

Mrs. T. You are the only child?

Sir H. Yes. And my mother shut herself up. She saw very few people.

Mrs. T. Lady Jardine must be quite young?

Sir H. (*with a laugh*) Oh, well, the dear old mater's about forty-two, I suppose—

Mrs. T. (*her colour deepening for an instant*) Ah. And very devoted to you?

Sir H. Oh, yes. This trip of mine was rather a blow to her—but she insisted upon it—

Mrs. T. You've been away a long time?

Sir H. About a year. I had six months' shooting in India.

Mrs. T. The Anglo-Indian ladies are very fascinating, are they not?

Sir H. I suppose so—but they didn't fascinate me. I prefer tigers.

Mrs. T. Well, you must have had a very good time.

Sir H. Oh, yes. I've been almost everywhere—but I like San Francisco best.

Mrs. T. It's a very beautiful city.

Sir H. I wasn't thinking of the city.

Mrs. T. Ah, of course, you admire the bay. Most Englishmen fall in love with the Pacific at their first sight of it. Tell me, have you seen my husband to-day?

Sir H. Yes—at the Club. He asked me to dine here to-morrow.

Mrs. T. Ah.—What was he doing at the Club?

Sir H. Playing picquet with young Darley.

Mrs. T. Darley?

Sir H. The young fellow who was here at dinner the other night.

Mrs. T. Oh, yes, I remember. His father's enormously rich. I suppose my husband was winning?

Sir H. Rather. He had a pile of gold in front of him.

Mrs. T. Then he'll be in a good temper to-night. Has he won much of you?

Sir H. Oh, just a bit. I've had very bad luck, you know.

Mrs. T. (*quietly*) Most people do have bad luck when they play with my husband.

Sir H. (*startled*) Mrs. Transford! What do you mean?

Mrs. T. Merely that he is an exceedingly good player, and that most young men are not.—Are you?

Sir H. Oh, I hate cards.

MRS. T. Then why do you play? (SIR HARRY bites his lips, blushes, and cannot find an answer.)

MRS. T. (looking steadily at him) Why?

SIR H. (fidgeting) Oh, well— I don't know.

MRS. T. You think that if you didn't play cards with the husband, you would not be allowed to come here and flirt with the wife?

SIR H. (starting to his feet in dismay) Oh, Mrs. Transford, how awfully unkind!

MRS. T. Sit down, sit down. But isn't it true?

SIR H. (stammering) I—

MRS. T. Have you any friends in San Francisco? I mean people to whom you have letters?

SIR H. I haven't presented my letters.

MRS. T. You have gone to your banker's?

SIR H. Yes.

MRS. T. And he certainly asked you to dinner?

SIR H. (very uncomfortable) Er—yes. I wish you wouldn't—

MRS. T. And in the course of conversation he will have learned that you were intimate with the Transfords. And he will have told you that the husband was a man of no private means and no occupation; once a popular actor, but who had been compelled to give up his profession owing to his having on two occasions been intoxicated on the stage. And that he now earned a very handsome living by playing cards with strangers—like you. Didn't he tell you this?

SIR H. (very unhappy) Oh,—er—

MRS. T. Did he, or did he not?

SIR H. He did.

MRS. T. That's honest. But he said more than that?

SIR H. Really, Mrs. Transford!

MRS. T. He also told you that the wife was of material assistance to the husband, as she was very kind to the young men whose money he won.

SIR H. (hotly) And I said it was a lie.

MRS. T. My dear friend, I hope you didn't put it quite so bluntly.

SIR H. I did, though; and I got up, and left the house.

MRS. T. (serenely) You owe that respectable banker an apology.

SIR H. Mrs. Transford!

MRS. T. What he said was perfectly true.

SIR H. (in dismay) True!

MRS. T. Our establishment is expensive; the money all comes from young men like yourself. San Francisco in

the season—the watering-places, and so forth. Don't look so scared. You may smoke, if you wish to.

SIR H. Mrs. Transford!

Mrs. T. My dear Harry—if you will allow me to call you Harry—I don't want you to think too badly of me either. Mr. Transford is not in the very least jealous; but my relations with his youthful friends are . . . strictly platonic.

SIR H. (*colouring*) There was no need to assure me of that.

Mrs. T. They come here and flirt with me—as you do; they tell me how glad they are to be with me—as you do; and they end up by making love to me, as you were about to do, if I hadn't stopped you.

SIR H. (*steadily*) I don't think I am quite like the others.

Mrs. T. No: you are a very dear boy. And I assure you I have never told the "others" what I have told you. I flirt with them to their hearts' content—I let them tell me they love me till they're tired. And then they go, and make room for the next one.

SIR H. And why have you treated me differently?

Mrs. T. Because I . . . like you.

SIR H. (*seizing her hand*) Mrs. Transford!

Mrs. T. (*giving his hand a friendly squeeze and withdrawing hers*) I am not a bad sort, you know. Your banker would not believe it, but I really am not. Life is a sorry business, but it has to be lived; and a poor devil like me can't afford to be nice as regards ways and means. A woman, you see, is very much handicapped. A man may retrieve a false step—but she—never!

SIR H. A false step—You!

Mrs. T. (*after a moment's pause*) Tell me, Harry, have you ever met Lord Winthorpe in London?

SIR H. Yes: he belongs to my club. They say he's great on astronomy.

Mrs. T. (*drily*) Very. And how is he?

SIR H. Oh, all right, I should think. He's a dry old stick.

Mrs. T. (*rocking herself*) I once had the honour of being that old stick's wife.

SIR H. (*with a violent start*) What!!

Mrs. T. Yes. You see I, also, lost my father when I was a baby; I also was an only child; but it was not my fortune to have a devoted mother. Mine was exceedingly frivolous: and I saw her but seldom. My life was divided

between school and the nursery. When I was eighteen she married me to Lord Winthorpe.

SIR H. She married you?

MRS. T. She looked very young, you see; and the society of a grown-up daughter could not be agreeable. So she kept me at home. I had inherited a great deal of her frivolity; and my life was so dull that, in my eagerness to escape, I married the first man who asked me. He chanced to be Lord Winthorpe.

SIR H. And you weren't happy?

MRS. T. I was eighteen, he forty. I craved for society and amusement; his one delight was to look at the moon through a very long telescope. I had no children—a child might have saved me.

SIR H. Oh, I am so sorry!

MRS. T. And after three years I ran away—with Mr. Transford, the actor. (SIR HARRY *buries his face in his hands*) It made quite a little sensation at the time. I was what was called, in those days, a professional beauty. My photograph was in all the shop-windows. It sold, I believe, very freely—the price was only a shilling. I was giddy, flighty, and inconceivably foolish. But I had kept straight so far, and there is some merit in that, when one's husband's an astronomer. I met Mr. Transford, who made violent love to me. The women of my set all raved about him—there wasn't a grain of sense in the lot of us. He was certainly very good-looking. And I was only a doll. I had no friend to speak to me as I have spoken to you. "The world well lost for love" was my text. Mr. Transford and I went off together the night my husband discovered a new star, which was, I believe, about the size of the Isle of Wight. Don't you think it was very clever to discover so small a star?

SIR H. (*without raising his head*) Oh, Mrs. Transford, Mrs. Transford!

MRS. T. I'm afraid I've made you unhappy. Don't let this distress you. Shall I go on?

SIR H. Yes.

MRS. T. He took me to the South of France, and at first I was vaguely flattered and pleased. I had grown so tired of the moon! But that didn't last long. I had a little money of my own—that didn't last long either.

SIR H. Do you mean to say that Mr. Transford—

MRS. T. Not a penny, of course, after he had paid for the tickets. But they were very expensive. And so, when our money was nearly exhausted, we shipped ourselves off to New York. I fancy we both felt we had made a mistake.



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